

Excerpts from "The Odyssey"

Odysseus and the Swineherd

Background:

Odysseus finally arrives home on the shores of the Greek island of Ithaca. The Goddess Athena told him that his house was overrun with arrogant suitors who want to marry his wife, Penelope. She told him they were behaving wickedly, disrespecting Odysseus's family, and wasting all of the goods in the house. Athena disguised Odysseus as an old man so he could return to his house undercover the next morning. Before she sent him home, Athena brings Odysseus—in disguise—to his loyal friend the swineherd Eumaeus, who greeted his unknown guest warmly and gave him food and rest for the night.

Excerpt:

On that note,
the loyal swineherd led the way to his shelter,
showed his guest inside and sat Odysseus down
on brush and twigs he piles up for the visitor,
flinging over these the skin of a shaggy wild goat,
broad and soft, the swineherd's own good bedding.
The king, delighted to be so well received,
thanked the man at once: "My host—may Zeus
and the other Gods give you your heart's desire
for the royal welcome you have shown me here."
And you replied, Eumaeus, loyal swineherd,
"It's wrong, my friend, to send any stranger packing—
even one who arrives in worse shape than you.
Every stranger and beggar comes from Zeus
and whatever scrap they get from the likes of us
they'll find it welcome."